

1 A Transcript of a Discussion about the Cuban Missile Crisis

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3 with ROBERT McNAMARA

4 GEORGE BALL

5 U. ALEXIS JOHNSON

6 McGEORGE BUNDY

7 and RICHARD NEUSTADT, Moderator.

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1 MR. NEUSTADT: Gentlemen, sometime ago when some of us

2 met with Secretary Rusk to discuss the Cuban Missile Crisis, we
3 skirted the Secretary of Defense's perspective, Robert McNamara's
4 perspective, because he wasn't there. He had tried to get there,
5 but weather prevented. He is here today. And without inhibiting
6 any of the rest of you, I would like to open-up by asking --
7 asking him the first questions, beginning, Bob, with the issue
8 how did you see the nature of the problem when you first became
9 aware that the Soviets were enplacing missiles in Cuba? What
10 did you think the situation was and required?

11 MR. McNAMARA: Well, to begin to think about possible
12 ways of reacting one had to start there. And it took sometime for
13 the group of us that were considering it to come to any consensus
14 on the nature of the problem, because there was an obvious dis-
15 agreement between those, on the one hand, who saw a great increase
16 in strategic nuclear power -- the Soviet Union very close to the
17 U.S., 90 miles away -- and those of us who saw it, but didn't
18 believe that it in anyway changed the strategic nuclear balance.
19 And I think ultimately we came to that conclusion, that the U.S.
20 had had a great superiority, numerical superiority -- superiority
21 in strategic nuclear power before the Soviet moves into Cuba,
22 but that superiority, numerical superiority, was not such that
23 it could be translated into usable military power to support
24 political objectives. Because before the missiles were placed
25 in Cuba, before the bombers were placed in Cuba, the Soviets had

1 enough strategic nuclear power to face us with the prospect of
2 unacceptable damage if we used ours first against them, or if we
3 used ours in any fashion against them.

4 And therefore, in a very real sense, we believed before
5 the forces were put into Cuba, that we were deterred from using
6 our strategic nuclear forces.

7 MR. NEUSTADT: That depends on your conception of --

8 MR. McNAMARA: Deterrence.

9 MR. NEUSTADT: -- of unacceptable damage.

10 MR. McNAMARA: Yes, it does, exactly. And -- And the
11 belief I held then, the belief I held today -- hold today is that
12 a President of the United States feels that his first responsi-
13 bility is to protect this nation and he is unwilling, I think --
14 certainly that was true of President Kennedy and President John-
15 son after him, and I believe it would be true of most U.S. Presi-
16 dents. They would be unwilling to consciously sacrifice an impor-
17 tant part of our population or our land and place it in great
18 jeopardy to a strike by Soviet strategic forces, whether it be
19 one city, or two cities, or three cities. And before the weapons
20 were placed in Cuba, the Soviet Union had the power to respond
21 to U.S. strategic nuclear action in ways that would endanger one
22 or more of our cities. And therefore, we felt deterred from using
23 our numerical superiority and that was not changed by the intro-
24 duction of nuclear weapons into Cuba.

25 That doesn't mean to say we didn't have a problem that

1 we needed to react to. But it began to -- to place the nature of
2 that problem in a somewhat different context than it first
3 appeared.

4 MR. NEUSTADT: Why do anything? If you have no strate-
5 gic problem, why not just say ho-hum, missiles in Cuba, so what?

6 MR. McNAMARA: I think that we felt then, certainly I
7 felt then and feel now that the Soviets do not wish, did not wish,
8 do not wish a large scale war with the West, but that they will
9 probe for weakness. We've seen that many times. We saw in 1961
10 when they put pressure on Berlin, for example. We've seen it many
11 times since. They will probe for weakness and they will take ad-
12 vantage of weakness when they find it. And that weakness can be
13 either military, or political, or both. And the great danger in
14 this situation was not that the military balance had been
15 changed, because, as I have suggested to you, we didn't believe
16 that it had, but rather that if we failed to react, that the
17 Soviets would believe, and as a matter of fact the American pub-
18 lic and the publics of the Western European nations would believe
19 the political balance had been changed.

20 The Soviets would recognize weakness and they would
21 move to take advantage of that weakness, political weakness. And
22 it was that fear or that belief that led us to the conclusion we
23 had to react in some fashion. But our reaction should be addressed
24 to the problem and the problem was not strictly speaking, in the
25 narrow sense, a military problem.

1 MR. BUNDY:

2 Could one just add on that point that

3 long before we were faced with any kind of calculation of whether
4 there was a change in the strategic balance -- that is to say,
5 during the summer when the rumors began -- the President had
6 clearly thought about it and had said that he didn't believe they
7 would do anything as dangerous as to put offensive weapons into
8 Cuba, but that if they did, the gravest issues would arise. And
9 without presuming to know everything that was in his head when
10 he said that, he clearly wasn't thinking about how many missiles
11 of what weight, in which place, but rather about what it
12 would mean if the Soviet Union thought it could put thermo-
13 nuclear weapons in the Western Hemisphere after a warning that
14 this really would be conduct that the American people would take
15 the gravest view of.

16 And just as an additional point, I think one has to
17 bear in mind that in thinking about this, we had also to ask our-
18 selves what our own country would think. And it was very clear
19 that public reaction to this action would be, if anything,
20 stronger than anything we were considering in that first week.

21 I'm not trying to change the point, but only to add one
22 element in what is this issue.

23 MR. NEUSTADT: So that action despite warning, even if
24 the warning was, in fact, belated, the warning had been given. It
25 was a public fact.

24 MR. BUNDY:

25 Public warning.

1 MR. BALL: Yes, and there is one other element,

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2 which at least in my mind played a -- a role, not the key role,
3 but certainly a significant role. And that was that the Soviets
4 deliberately acted in deceit. That this was the most flagrant
5 kind of deception on their part. They were constantly giving us
6 assurances that they were not doing this, when, in fact, they
7 were going ahead and doing it. They, even after we learned it,
8 had full proof that they were doing it, we were still getting
9 that kind of denial. And we could not be in a position of accepting
10 an act of deception without some kind of -- of reaction, apart
11 from the other considerations that have been mentioned.

12 MR. JOHNSON: Yes. In that connection, I think it's
13 useful to recall Gromyko's conversation with the President after
14 we had discovered the missiles there.

15 MR. BALL: In other words, if we're going to live
16 in a world with the Soviet Union, where the relations are almost
17 by definition somewhat adversarial, we have to insist on a cer-
18 tain pattern of conduct on their side. And if we accept an act
19 of deception without a reaction, then it seems to me we simply
20 encourage them to continue deception, and that makes any kind of
21 modus vivendi impossible.

22 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, now Khrushchev said in his
23 memoirs, if indeed they were his memoirs, that on the one hand
24 these -- these weapons were intended for defensive purpose, so
25 that if they were outside the President's warning because the

President had distinguished defensive from offensive. And second, 2
that -- that the Russians kept it secret to try to be helpful to 3
Mr. Kennedy. They didn't want to create trouble for him before 4
the congressional elections. How about that, George?

5 MR. BALL: Well, I think that's manifest nonsense, 6
given all the circumstances. This is an excuse that he might have 7
used with his own people, but it certainly was not persuasive to 8
any American.

9 MR. NEUSTADT: How did you get into the defensive- 10
offensive distinction, which may have confused them?

11 MR. BUNDY: Well, the distinction was really not 12
defensive-offensive. The distinction was conventional-nuclear 13
and that was a polite way of talking about it. And Mr. Krushchev 14
can play games with that in his memoirs, but he was not in any 15
doubt and nobody else was. And really to have accepted that form 16
of words as a cover and a means of saying oh, it doesn't matter 17
would have fooled nobody, least of all ourselves.

18 MR. JOHNSON: I can't recall that at the time they even 19
made any allegation that they were defensive. Now he does in his 20
memoirs, but they did not when they -- when this was all exposed.

21 MR. BUNDY: They did maintain that we were the only 22
ones who said they were offensive. You will recall, at the end, 23
he says that we will withdraw the weapons which you consider --

24 MR. JOHNSON: Which you call offensive, that's right.

25 MR. BUNDY: -- offensive. But all that's words games.

1 MR. JOHNSON: But they didn't debate it.

2 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, given the problem definition,
3 what about the alternatives?

4 MR. McNAMARA: Well, then -- then the question was how
5 to react. And as I have said, the fact that we didn't think it
6 changed the strategic nuclear balance, I think pointed our reac-
7 tions in certain ways. But within the general direction we -- we
8 considered we should move, there were several different alterna-
9 tives we considered ranging from blockade or quarantine on the
10 one hand, to invasion on the other.

11 As one looks back on that period, I think we would
12 have to recognize a paranoia among -- among the American people
13 with respect to Cuba. It existed for a number of years. There
14 were some, certainly some parts of our public, and some in the
15 Congress and in the Executive Branch who believed that Castro
16 was such a threat that we should take this opportunity to invade
17 and overthrow Castro. That was one extreme.

18 Another extreme was the view of those who felt that
19 we should seek to put sufficient pressure on - on Khrushchev to
20 force him to remove the offensive weapons or to make them inoper-
21 able, but no more than was required to do that, and with the least
22 danger of some undesirable Soviet reaction. And that group put
23 forward the blockade. Inbetween there were other alternatives.
24 The possibility of what was called the surgical strike, perhaps
25 50 sorties by aircraft against the sites, designed to destroy the

1 weapons.

2 As we began to consider these alternatives, we very
3 quickly moved to a consideration I think points to lessons
4 applicable today. Consideration of how the Soviets would react.
5 We couldn't just assume that we would blockade and they would do
6 nothing. We couldn't assume that if we invaded and destroyed the
7 Castro government they would do nothing.

8 And therefore, as we laid out the alternatives, we --
9 we debated how the Soviets would respond and how we would res-
10 pond. And we had to assume in each case they would respond. And
11 some of the potential responses were very dangerous indeed. I
12 mentioned three alternatives: blockade or quarantine, surgical
13 air strike against the offensive weapons, and at the other
14 extreme, an invasion.

15 Very soon it became clear that a surgical air strike
16 could probably not remain surgical. That the -- the -- a strike
17 of 50 sorties against the offensive weapons would probably have
18 to be enlarged to take out Cuban air defense, including their
19 fighter bases, and probably raised to such a degree that almost
20 surely it would involve an invasion. And we then began to con-
21 sider how the Soviets would respond alternatively to a quarantine
22 versus -- versus some form of military pressure, possibly invol-
23 ving either a large air strike and/or an invasion. And we had to
24 conclude there was a high risk that they would respond to some
25 pressure on Berlin, on Turkey, on other parts of NATO, and these

1 were factors that -- that were taken into account and ultimately
2 led, I think, to almost unanimous support for the quarantine.

3 MR. JOHNSON: Bob should add there, I think, that there
4 was some support -- I don't say it was given very much considera-
5 tion -- for the so-called diplomatic approach. That is, that we
6 should tell the Soviets that we've discovered the weapons and
7 working through the U.N. and diplomatic sources, try to persuade
8 them to remove the weapons.

9 MR. McNAMARA: Yes.

10 MR. JOHNSON: I'm not saying that was really a
11 serious -- a serious alternative, but it was -- it was advocated
12 though.

13 MR. McNAMARA: And I think it was associated, at least
14 by some supporters of that, Alex, associated with the thought
15 that one could start with a diplomatic approach and if that were
16 not successful, it could --

17 MR. JOHNSON: That's right and then --

18 MR. McNAMARA: -- we could then, in a sense --

19 MR. JOHNSON: -- and then move up the scale.

20 MR. McNAMARA: -- escalate in a military direction.

21 MR. JOHNSON: That's right. That's right. Yes.

22 MR. McNAMARA: Which, by the way, was one of the main
23 arguments in favor -- put forward by those who favored the quar-
24 antine, that if one started with a quarantine, relatively, I'll
25 call it, low level military action. If it didn't succeed, one

1 could move, if then thought desirable, to higher level of mili-
2 tary action. But the point --

3 The important point I want to make here is that very
4 early on in the consideration of these alternative responses, we
5 began to consider how the Soviets would respond to the response.
6 And we recognized the potential escalation beyond what we would
7 perhaps have in mind when we took the first step.

8 MR. BALL: There was another point, I think, which is
9 associated with that, and that is that unless the installation
10 of a blockade resulted in the sinking of a Soviet ship, no irre-
11 revocable act had been taken, which required or made imperative a
12 response on the Soviet side. There would be time, possibly, for
13 -- for conversation and this thing might be sorted out.

14 Once an irrevocable act had been taken, whether a sur-
15 gical air strike or an invasion, or something of that kind, then
16 the Soviets would be compelled to do something in the nature of
17 retaliation. So what we were doing was buying time for a dialogue,
18 having made clear our position as a very firm position, putting
19 it up to the Soviet Union to have the option of withdrawal without
20 creating a situation where some kind of retaliation would be
21 imperative.

22 MR. JOHNSON: In short, we did not need to start the
23 shooting.

24 MR. BALL: That's right.

25 MR. BUNDY: Not only didn't need to, we didn't want to.

1 If we could get those weapons out without shooting, we wanted
2 to get them out.

3 MR. JOHNSON (Simultaneous w/Bundy): Well, I say, the
4 weapons -- No, the weapons. That's what I say. It did not require
5 us to -- All the other courses of action required -- required us
6 to start shooting.

7 MR. BALL: And an irrevocable act. I think this is a
8 very significant point.

9 MR. NEUSTADT: But, if it's in -- Okay. I accept that
10 point. Now take the other side of it. If it is implicit in the
11 quote "surgical strike," it has to be a big surgical strike and
12 it probably has to be followed by an invasion, which is what I
13 think I heard you say. Why did that remain a live option for four
14 days? You know, 20 years later, it seems like a hell of a way to
15 use military power. How long did you think it would take you to
16 -- to get rid of the -- of the guerilla actions in Cuba after
17 you started down that course?

18 MR. McNAMARA: It wasn't as much that that deterred us
19 from the -- the invasion route, but rather the recognition that
20 an invasion would (a) cause the death of a substantial number of
21 Americans, and we made some very rough estimates, and one can
22 argue about them, but we recognized the possibility 25,000 Ameri-
23 cans might die in the process. (b) That there would be very sub-
24 stantial loss of Cuban life. And (c) that almost surely the
25 Soviets would have to respond in areas outside of Cuba. You're

1 quite correct in implying that if we had had an invasion, apart
2 from the loss of life, ours and theirs, we would have had a very
3 serious problem of stabilizing the situation in Cuba.

4 MR. BALL: And a lot of Russians would have been
5 killed --

6 MR. McNAMARA: And a lot of Russians would have been
7 killed. And almost surely, the Soviets, both because some Rus-
8 sians were killed in Cuba and because, in a sense, we had con-
9 fronted them with a military challenge, would feel it necessary,
10 so we thought, to respond elsewhere in the world. And we then
11 would be faced into a possible response elsewhere in the world.

12 So, we saw this -- the danger of escalation and I
13 think it was that action-reaction recognition that led us to
14 wish to achieve our objective, a very limited objective. We
15 weren't seeking to overthrow Castro. We weren't seeking to
16 change the relationship of Cuba to the United States. We were
17 seeking only one thing: the removal of the offensive missiles
18 and aircraft. And we wished to achieve that at the lowest poss-
19 ible risk and we recognized that if we failed to achieve that
20 by applying an quarantine, we still had the option, should we
21 wish to exercise it, of moving to the next higher level of risk.

22 *Bundy*
23 MR. ~~JOHNSON~~: May I go back to your question, which is
24 why did the air strike stay alive as long as it did. Well, I
25 think there were a lot of reasons for that. One was that the
first reaction of so many people was, well, you know, they have

1 done this, we didn't think they would, they had surprised us,
2 the obvious thing to do is to take them out, a simple-minded
3 phrase, but it occurred to many people. It's what the President
4 said to me, the very first morning. I don't mean to be stuck with
5 it, or that it was in any sense a final response. It happened
6 again when the members of Congress were briefed the following
7 Monday. It was the very strong reaction of Dean Acheson, who had
8 been a kind of elder statesman and adviser to the Administration
9 precisely on the question of Soviet danger, particularly around
10 Berlin, but more generally.

11 And in addition, I had feelings about -- There were
12 weaknesses to the blockade, which we don't need to take time on
13 now. But the most important point, I think, and one that we
14 should hear from Bob McNamara about, was that the uniformed mili-
15 tary leaders, who were highly disciplined in the end, I think,
16 about accepting the course the President laid down, were very
17 strongly of the opinion that this was a provocation which
18 required a prompt and effective military response. And for them
19 that meant military action against the island of Cuba. And I
20 think it would be important for Bob to tell us, not the whole
21 story because you'd need to hear from the military, but his view
22 of the problem of working with the military in that first week
23 of consultation.

24 MR. McNAMARA: Well, I want to go back to one of
25 the problems Mac made. The support for a massive air strike

1 and/or an invasion was the first reaction of most people con-
2 fronting the problem. You mentioned the -- the congressional
3 representatives. The Congress was not consulted or briefed until,
4 as you recall, on the Monday following the decision of Sunday to
5 -- to initiate the blockade action. And I think I'm correct in
6 saying that almost unanimously the members of Congress opposed
7 the President's decision to initiate a blockade and favored much
8 stronger military action, either a large air strike or invasion.
9 That was the immediate reaction of most people confronting the
10 problem.

11 And I think one of the lessons to be learned from this
12 situation is that one should not act on one's immediate reaction.
13 One should take time to think through the implications of that
14 and alternative courses of action, because those of us who did
15 have the time to think it through, as the members of Congress
16 did not, changed our minds or gained support for an initial posi-
17 tion contrary to that, that view.

18 Now why -- Why did those who supported the invasion
19 alternative continue to hold that view after they'd had time to
20 think of the possible reaction? And I think because they viewed
21 the Soviet threat in a different way, is one reason. Secondly, I
22 think they felt -- and we were never able to test the validity
23 of this thought -- but I think they felt that an invasion might
24 be more costly if it were deferred, rather than put forward as
25 the initial response. If we started with a quarantine and

1 ultimately had to move to an invasion, the Soviets would have had
2 time to prepare for it, both militarily and politically, and not
3 only on the island of Cuba, but -- with potential responses and
4 perhaps more dangerous responses elsewhere in the world. So
5 those were their reasons.

6 I think they were wrong. I think with hindsight we
7 were right in starting with the quarantine, but it was not an
8 easy decision for many of the members of the Executive Committee
9 to come to.

10 MR. NEUSTADT: Because the quarantine could fail of
11 the minimal objective that it's proponents had set for it. That
12 is it could -- could fail to remove those missiles.

13 MR. McNAMARA: Correct. Yes.

14 MR. NEUSTADT: Leaving you then with --

15 MR. McNAMARA: With what to do and, in a sense, with
16 a more dangerous situation, because then we could hardly, having
17 instituted a quarantine --

18 MR. NEUSTADT: Then you have to go up.

19 MR. McNAMARA: -- and having failed to achieve a
20 narrow objective, it would have been very difficult not to esca-
21 late to the next step for which the Soviets would have had more
22 time to prepare. And I think that was the argument used by many
23 in favor of going to a higher escalation initially.

24 MR. BALL: There was another element which played a
25 role in this and which I think Bobby Kennedy made clearer than

1 anyone, when he said my brother will not be the Tito (sic) -- or
2 the --

3 MR. NEUSTADT: Tojo.

4 MR. BALL: The Tojo of 1961.

5 MR. JOHNSON: Or the Tito either.

6 MR. NEUSTADT: Or the Tito either, or the Tojo in this
7 case.

8 MR. BALL: Meaning that a surprise attack was all too
9 reminiscent of Pearl Harbor. A surprise attack would be some-
10 thing that would be out of character for a great nation such as
11 the United States. Nevertheless, if we had immediately responded
12 with what was the instinct, as Bob McNamara suggested, of a
13 number of people, we'd immediately responded with an air strike.
14 It would have been a secret air strike, an unannounced air strike
15 presumably, and that the United States would have been held up
16 in the world as a country who attacked a small country with --
17 and took it by surprise in a very unattractive way.

18 MR. JOHNSON: Yes. I recall that Bobby's point on that
19 affected many members of the ExCom who were up to that point
20 thinking in terms of an air strike.

21 MR. BALL: Well, I had made a statement very early-on
22 which was certainly representative of deep convictions I had that
23 every nation has to act out of -- in character, and if it acts
24 out of character it destroys itself to some extent. And Bobby
25 said it very much better later on when he said my brother will

1 not be the Tojo of 196 --

2 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, if I understand correctly what
3 happened in the week -- you had this time, of the four or five
4 days, you had time and we can later ask what happens if you
5 don't have time. Is the -- The decision which is more costly,
6 the small start or the big one, is -- is argued out. But some-
7 thing else is argued out. What are the minimal objectives for
8 which we're going to do -- we're going to act at all here? Did
9 I get that right? And that not everybody involved was satisfied
10 with those minimal objectives.

11 MR. BUNDY: There's another way of stating that, and
12 again I think Bob is in a very strong position to help to clarify
13 it. I think that what your objectives were depended upon who you
14 chose to make your target, and vice versa.

15 If you were strongly in favor of dealing with the
16 Castro problem with this as a kind of opportunity to do so, then
17 your objective was not to have a treaty with Castro, it was to
18 get rid of him. And that goes with, in general, the position
19 that favors very strong action against the island of Cuba, not
20 everybody, but in general.

21 If, on the other hand, you thought that this was a
22 problem which posed the gravest of dangers between the United
23 States and the U.S.S.R., then your objective would be to deal
24 with the problem which created that danger, which was the mis-
25 siles, neither more nor less. And if you reached the second

1 conclusion, then you would frame the whole enterprise around
2 Soviet responses, as Bob has already suggested, what will they
3 do, and you would regard Cuba and Castro himself as -- not only
4 as dependent variables, but as dependent variables of very low
5 weight. I don't know whether that --

6 MR. McNAMARA: Yes, I think Mac has explained it very
7 well. There was among our people a time a paranoia with respect
8 to Cuba. Very common. It was held by the public, and it was held
9 by members of Congress, and by some members of the Executive
10 Branch.

11 MR. BUNDY: And we'd campaigned on it.

12 MR. McNAMARA: And it -- It was perhaps understandable,
13 but that doesn't make it something one should yield to.

14 MR. NEUSTADT: Or you'd have a Bay of Pigs.

15 MR. McNAMARA: However -- However, this was an oppor-
16 tunity for those who -- who felt that way to suggest let's deal
17 with our Cuban problem. And it was that feeling that led some to
18 support a proposed invasion.

19 I think the President ultimately decided, and I think
20 the Executive Committee agreed, the problem that we were going to
21 deal with was not a Cuban problem; the problem was a Soviet prob-
22 lem and we should look upon it as such. It was a potential change
23 in the balance of relationships, not between the U.S. and Cuba,
24 not even between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, but rather between
25 NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and we should think of it in those terms

1 And we should take the minimum action...

2 (End of Side 1, audiotape No. 1.)

3 MR. McNAMARA (Continuing on Side 2):...other way in
4 the future. And that was really initially the major difference
5 of opinion between those who wished to -- to invade Cuba, on the
6 one hand, versus those who suggested the quarantine, on the
7 other.

8 MR. BUNDY: I think we should press this point,
9 because if I recollect correctly, there was nobody that I recall
10 outside the military and the very top of the intelligence, where
11 I think perhaps John McCone may have shared this general view,
12 who held the view that the problem was to be framed in terms of
13 cutting out the Cuban cancer. And therefore, the fact that this
14 opinion was not pressed harder on the President than it was has
15 a great deal to do with the judgment rendered and expressed for
16 the Defense Department by Mr. McNamara. And I think anything he
17 can tell us about the way that argument progressed in the Penta-
18 gon is important because it didn't go very far in those terms
19 in the ExCom, at least as I recollect it.

20 MR. McNAMARA: Well, I -- I think in the Pentagon the
21 views differed. I know you will talk to General Taylor and I
22 would wish him to express his own view. But my recollection of
23 his view was that he, in contrast to some of the other Chiefs,
24 did not favor an invasion in order to overthrow Castro and change
25 the relationship between Cuba and the U.S. But there were strong

1 feelings in the Pentagon that that should -- we should take
2 advantage of this situation, an opportunity some called it, to --
3 to solve a problem that we'd lived with for three or four years
4 before then, and that it was feared would adversely affect us
5 in the future. And therefore, there was strong support among
6 some quarters in the Pentagon for the invasion route, for
7 exactly that reason.

8 There were others in the Pentagon who felt that regard-
9 less of whether we -- we weakened Castro or not, we would need
10 to apply more pressure on Khrushchev than would be applied by a
11 blockade, if we wished to force him to take those offensive
12 weapons out or make them inoperable. And they were the ones who
13 supported initially the surgical strike and moved later to a
14 recognition or a belief that it could not remain surgical and
15 therefore one should plan on an initial large-scale air attack,
16 which they also recognized would very likely be followed by an
17 invasion, which might have the incidental effect of overthrowing
18 Castro, but would not have been initially directed toward that
19 end.

20 MR. BALL: One other -- One other element which again
21 might be mentioned and that is that the effect of limiting action
22 to a quarantine, at least as the initial step, was that it tended
23 to localize any possible Soviet response. They could respond by
24 -- respond by trying to run their ships through, but the response
25 to a quarantine wouldn't be a bombardment of the missile bases in

1 Ankara, or wouldn't be a pressure on Berlin. This wouldn't be --
2 appear to be the indicated response.

3 On the other hand, an air strike could -- could very
4 well have -- have triggered that kind of retaliation against
5 Berlin, or even against -- very specifically against Turkey,
6 which would have caused a great deal of problems for us, because
7 we had our missiles in Turkey at that time.

8 MR. McNAMARA: We considered the problem of a Soviet
9 strike against Turkey, because we had missiles there and there
10 was some apparent balance, Cuban missiles-Turkish missiles. And
11 there was certainly the possibility that the Soviets would respond
12 to our air strike on Cuba by some pressure on Turkey and we
13 couldn't have tolerated a Soviet strike on Turkey without a
14 response. And it was that action-reaction and the potential
15 escalation that we took great account of in examining and evalua-
16 ting the alternatives. And we had time to do it. And I come back
17 to this importance of the time. It took time to do this. It took
18 time for our own thinking to recognize the danger of Soviet
19 response, the alternative forms of that response, and the need
20 to our response to the response.

21 MR. BALL: In other words, a Soviet bombing of the
22 missiles in Turkey would have triggered the whole NATO Treaty
23 mechanism.

24 MR. JOHNSON: I hope we can come back to this question
25 of time to consider this, because I think that was one of the --

1 that was one of the keys that we were able to handle, the President
2 and the ExCom were able to keep the security on the issue
3 and on the consideration of responses to it within a small group
4 which gave that group time to think about and talk these things
5 through free from the pressures of -- of outside influences.

6 MR. McNAMARA: I think one -- One can almost draw a
7 law from this. Within certain limits, the longer the time taken
8 to form the decision, the more sound the decision will be.

9 MR. JOHNSON: Yes.

10 MR. McNAMARA: I'm certain that was true in --

11 MR. JOHNSON: Very much so.

12 MR. McNAMARA: -- four, or five or six days in this
13 case.

14 MR. BALL: We were lucky in one regard. That is that
15 we discovered the missiles before they were operative. If the
16 missiles had been operative at the time we discovered them, I
17 think we would have felt rather differently.

18 MR. JOHNSON: Yes, I remember during that week, if you
19 recall --

20 MR. BUNDY: Logically, it wouldn't have made any
21 difference, but psychologically it would have made a very big
22 one.

23 MR. McNAMARA: But I'd still put forward my law. Even
24 if we hadn't discovered the missiles until after they were operative,
25 I think the longer time we would have taken to consider

1 how to react, the more sound our reaction would be, within
2 certain limits.

3 MR. BUNDY: Let's linger on that one moment though,
4 because the thing we all remember about the time we had was that
5 we had it, in part, really in very large part because nothing
6 had leaked --

7 MR. JOHNSON: Yes, that's right.

8 MR. BUNDY: Because certainly one story in the news-
9 papers would have changed the environment of the discussion and
10 we all wanted not to do that and we wanted to preserve what
11 turned out to be very valuable, the President's right, in effect,
12 to set the terms of the crisis by his own announcement before
13 there were leaks.

14 Now accepting Bob's law, that the more time the
15 better, I think one has to add another law that has developed
16 in the last 20 years, which is likely there will be less time
17 than there was the last time because things leak much faster in
18 the government of the United States than they did 10 years ago,
19 let alone 20 years ago.

20 Unless you're determined, and this may be your point,
21 to take the time in spite of the leaks.

22 MR. McNAMARA: Well, I -- A, I am, Mac, determined to
23 take the time in spite of the leaks, or would recommend to the
24 Executive Branch they take the time in spite of the leaks. But
25 B, I would urge that the Executive Branch, the public and the

1 media think about this whole problem. I'm not suggesting that
2 the media should not report whatever they know under most cir-
3 cumstances, but I am suggesting there are certain circumstances,
4 and I would suggest that the consideration of the use of military
5 power is one of those, where the President and the Executive
6 Branch are constituted authorities who have the decisionmaking
7 power to apply military power, should be given time to think
8 through the problem. And the members of the Executive Branch
9 should recognize a greater responsibility to avoid leaks under
10 those circumstances than perhaps they do otherwise. And the
11 public should be more tolerant of secrecy in the Executive
12 Branch under those circumstances, as should be the media.

13 Now maybe those are hard -- hard rules of conduct to
14 adhere to, but I suggest that we should at least talk about those
15 in our society.

16 MR. NEUSTADT: I like your other one, too. I've never
17 heard it discussed before, which is if -- If the public -- If
18 the media and the public don't act in the way -- and the bureau-
19 cracy does not act in the way that you would think appropriate,
20 you're saying the chief officials of the government should --
21 should not let publicity precipitate them into action. Is that
22 what you're saying?

23 MR. McNAMARA: Now I understand the costs of that. I am
24 saying that. And I want to very quickly say I understand the costs
25 of that because you give up surprise or some element of surprise

1 perhaps. And by giving up surprise or tactical surprise you pay
2 a potential cost --

3 MR. BUNDY: You may, not always.

4 MR. McNAMARA: You may. And what I'm suggesting to
5 you is, in my view, in most situations, the potential cost asso-
6 ciated with giving up surprise is less than the potential cost
7 of making a decision without having thought through its conse-
8 quences.

9 MR. BALL: Bob, I hate to think, however, of what would
10 have happened if there had been a really serious leak on, say,
11 Tuesday instead of Friday when -- when The New York Times finally
12 did get the story.

13 MR. McNAMARA: Well, I hate to think of it. That's why
14 I'm suggesting the law because I really -- I really think --
15 The greatest lesson I took out of this, George, is the -- the --
16 the increasing soundness of the decision with the passage of
17 time.

18 MR. BALL: Well, I agree. But I'm just trying to think
19 how we could have held off for three, or four, or five days with
20 the country screaming at us, when are you going to react, what
21 are you going to do, with speeches in the Congress, with resolu-
22 tions being passed, with demonstrations in the streets, the place
23 would have been -- the country would have been up in arms.

24 MR. JOHNSON: And giving the Soviets during that period
25 a time to decide what they were going to do.

1 (Several speaking at once briefly here.)

2
3 MR. McNAMARA: Let me suggest to you how we could have
4 reacted. And the only reason I want to dwell on this is if we're
5 going to face these situations in the future -- there's no ques-
6 tion about it in my mind. And the great temptation is to respond
7 to the public pressure. And if you accept my law, that the
8 response is likely to increase in wisdom with the passage of
9 time, you pay a very heavy price to respond to the pressure.

10
11 So, I -- Accepting what George has said, let me suggest
12 how we should have responded if we had -- if it had leaked on
13 Tuesday.

14
15 The President should have said I am determined to
16 protect this nation. The security of this nation is my number
17 one responsibility. At the same time --

18
19 MR. JOHNSON: Well, of course, the advantage we had
20 was, with no leak whatsoever, the Soviets had no contingency
21 plan to deal -- to deal with it.

22
23 MR. McNAMARA: Well, that's -- That's right. So he
24 starts by saying that.

25
26 MR. JOHNSON: -- have had more time to -- their contin-
27 gency plans.

28
29 MR. McNAMARA: But as an indication of that, I am
30 throwing up the reserves, I am moving air squadrons, I am con-
31 sulting with my allies. I'm not arguing that this is --

32
33 MR. BUNDY: I am going to the U.N. There are lots of

1 things that don't finally commit you that you can do for time.

2 MR. McNAMARA: Yes. The point -- The point I'm trying
3 to make is that all of you -- We've all served together. We all
4 know these terrible pressures. And there is an immense tempta-
5 tion to respond by immediately military action and I'm suggest-
6 ing it's dangerous.

7 MR. BALL: There's -- There's one other point that was
8 implied, but not stated, and that is had there been a leak on
9 Tuesday and an uproar in the United States -- and I totally
10 agree with what Bob has just said as to what the objective
11 should have been. There were two dangers. Not only that the
12 Soviet Union would have time to reply, but that the Soviet Union
13 would reply precipitously and lock itself in so that a solution
14 would have been impossible.

15 VOICE: Oh, sure, yes.

16 VOICE: Yes.

17 MR. BALL: Khrushchev saying something, you know, again
18 not taking the time to think it through. And this is the kind of
19 -- of action and reaction that really leads to deep, deep
20 trouble.

21 MR. JOHNSON: Yes, I think we all agree thoroughly
22 upon Bob's law.

23 MR. BALL: But I think what we ought to do -- I mean
24 the implication of what I'm saying is we ought to persuade the
25 Soviets to do the same thing, so we have this kind of mutually

1 understood law that nobody's going to act in a hurry.

2 MR. McNAMARA: Well, and that's a conclusion I -- In
3 this nuclear age, isn't that one of the things we ought to spend
4 more time thinking about.

5 We do an awful lot of talking about reducing the num-
6 bers of nuclear weapons, but we ought to also think about how to
7 reduce the risk of use. And one of the ways to do that is to
8 convince the Soviets that together we ought to communicate more
9 and take more time on whatever element of confrontation there is
10 between us.

11 MR. JOHNSON: There's a great deal to be said for that
12 and we -- we really need to have a better mechanism, it seems to
13 me, for --

14 MR. McNAMARA: I agree, absolutely.

15 MR. JOHNSON: Rather than right at -- starting at the
16 summit.

17 MR. BUNDY: And when you say mechanism, I take it
18 you're not just talking about -- although we need it -- a more
19 sophisticated, quicker, more rapidly translated all-purpose hot
20 line ---

21 MR. JOHNSON: Oh, no, no, no, no, no.

22 MR. BUNDY: You're talking about a process of communi-
23 cation which involves people, units, assignments, customs, prac-
24 tices, a sustained method of making sure that communication pre-
25 cisely about the things in which we have the gravest disagreements
exists.

1 MR. JOHNSON: Exists and can be used.

2 MR. NEUSTADT: Stockpiling things to do publicly while
3 you're thinking, both for the media's sake and the public's sake,
4 and with the Soviets, it seems to me I haven't heard that before.
5 I think it's very important, because no new Administration would
6 have your list of calling up the reserves or doing it now, isn't
7 that right?

8 MR. BUNDY: Well, I'm not sure that's -- I think that's
9 an important point, that you need to have some experience of
10 these options. There are military options, there are diplomatic
11 options, there are political options. One of the most obvious,
12 which we did not use in this case for our own reasons, is con-
13 sultation with the Congress. And consultation with the Congress
14 need never be a merely one-shot affair.

15 MR. NEUSTADT: No, and it can take an infinite amount
16 of time.

17 MR. BUNDY: And the Congress, if it thinks that the
18 Administration is too strong, is quite capable of having an ini-
19 tial reaction that is much more wary. This particular case, we
20 have decided on an action which the congressional leaders find
21 less strong than their own emotional reaction. But there are
22 plenty of examples the other way and I think we should not neglect
23 at all in thinking about not only ways of thinking, and ways of
24 saving time, but about serious constitutional process.

25 If we frame it that way, we will see that it's the

1 exception not the rule that you wish to start a flaming crisis
2 without a serious consultation with the Congress.

3 MR. NEUSTADT: What you all were trying to do was not,
4 quote, start a flaming crisis, but get the advantage of sur-
5prise.

6 MR. BUNDY: In what was already by the factual situa-
7tion --

8 MR. NEUSTADT: Right, de facto.

9 MR. BALL: Surprise and a reasoned --

10 MR. NEUSTADT: Yeah, that's right, yeah.

11 MR. BUNDY: Initiative --

12 MR. McNAMARA: Minimum response necessary to achieve
13 a narrow objective after thoughtful consideration of alterna-
14 tives.

15 MR. NEUSTADT: Let me ask you something that has not
16 come up before. If a number of people, civilians and military
17 people, saw Cuba as the primary problem, or if not the primary
18 problem, as an important secondary problem, take an advantage of
19 an opportunity to cure this secondary problem. It's like cross-
20 ing the 38th parallel in 1950 because for five years the U.N.
21 has been trying to unify Korea, so what the hell, let's get this
22 too. Whether it's primary or secondary, a lot of people, you're
23 saying thought that here was a time to get the Cubans out of play.

24 Now had the government at the highest level, between
25 the Bay of Pigs in the Spring of '61 and this occasion in

1 October of '62 -- At your level, had you ever decided that that
2 was -- that your policy was to live with Cuba? I know you
3 decided it in the end -- by the end of this crisis, because you
4 gave a pledge by the end of the crisis. But had you -- Had that
5 policy decision ever been made? Otherwise, all the people who
6 thought Cuba should be got rid of are acting on what they must
7 assume is -- is the Administration's desire, even though fumbled
8 in the Spring of '61?

9 MR. BUNDY: I think that it's even more severe than
10 that. I think that the -- after the Bay of Pigs, we did engage
11 in a policy of confrontation with Cuba, accompanied by a program
12 of covert action that wasn't very effective, but that wasn't
13 for lack of trying or for lack of pressure and initiative from
14 the President on down. And it was a perfectly legitimate feeling
15 for the rest of the Executive Branch to have that the Admin-
16 istrative really finds this -- this regime deeply offensive,
17 believes it's dangerous, and would welcome effective ways of
18 getting rid of it.

19 So that your question, which I'm sure is not wholly
20 innocent, is designed -- is correctly designed to bring out the
21 fact that we had not reached the conclusion that we must live
22 with this guy. We didn't even reach that conclusion after the
23 Missile Crisis, because the covert enterprises continued well
24 into '63. And it's really only in the Fall of '63 that the Presi-
25 dent turns his own attention to the question of a search for
alternatives.

1 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, you gave up then in October -- You
2 gave up an overt invasion --

3 MR. JOHNSON: The overt invasion. Invasion is what we
4 gave up, yes.

5 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, I hadn't seen before that the --
6 the upset about giving -- Two things -- If I hear you right, two
7 things are happening. At the top level of government the risk of
8 -- of -- this -- in this confrontation between you and -- and the
9 people in Moscow is powerfully concentrated in your minds on
10 something that the rest of the government is entitled to have a
11 fuzzy signal about, which would help explain why there was a --
12 a sense among numbers of military people that you'd -- you'd
13 been pucilanimus or you'd given up a great chance, or whatever
14 the proper terms are.

15 MR. McNAMARA: Well, I think that there was a feeling
16 among -- After the offensive weapons were removed from Cuba, I
17 think there was a feeling among some members of the Congress,
18 some members of the Executive Branch, including the military,
19 and some members of the public that we had missed an opportunity
20 to overthrow Castro. I don't think there's any question but what
21 that feeling existed.

22 MR. JOHNSON: We should have got more out of it.

23 MR. McNAMARA: Yeah, it was a rather common feeling
24 among some groups. I think they're absolutely wrong, but the
25 feeling existed. And in part it existed for just the reason you

1 pointed to, there'd been no decision beforehand, before October
2 of '62, that the government would not take advantage of an
3 opportunity to possibly use military force or some other force
4 to -- to eliminate Castro.

5 MR. NEUSTADT: And as you've said, it was a very popu-
6 lar notion in the United States, in the country.

7 MR. McNAMARA: The nation was paranoid. I don't want
8 to say the Administration; the nation was paranoid.

9 MR. JOHNSON: Without regard to the costs to us. With-
10 out regard to the fact that, quote, getting rid of Castro at
11 that point could not be accomplished by a quarantine of missiles.

12 MR. McNAMARA: Absolutely not.

13 MR. JOHNSON: It -- It had to be -- had to involve the
14 initiation by the United States of shooting, of shooting.

15 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, let us take a break, gentlemen,
16 for a few minutes and give them a chance to change the tape.

17 (End of Side 2, Audiotape Tape 1.)

18 MR. NEUSTADT: Let's turn to the question of putting
19 the President's chosen option into effect and mandating the work
20 that had to be done throughout the Executive Branch, military
21 and civil authorities, from the time of the decision was made to
22 start with the quarantine option. Have you got some points there,
23 Bob?

24 MR. McNAMARA: Yes. I think the implementation or the
25 monitoring of the implementation of the President's decision was

1 a very important element of the -- the action, because it wasn't
2 initially clear to everyone what the decision was. Quarantine,
3 normally thought to be synonymous with blockade. Blockade,
4 what's a blockade? Well, the American Navy had been operating
5 blockades at various times in the past 200 years and there were
6 certain rules of procedure how you run a blockade. And the most
7 important element of a blockade was to stop things from going
8 through, whatever you were blockading.

9 However, that wasn't the President's decision. The
10 President's decision was we wish to remove the offensive weapons
11 from Cuba. We want to convey to Khrushchev a message that that
12 is our single objective. It's a very narrow objective. We wish
13 to apply the minimum pressure necessary to accomplish it. We
14 don't wish to paint you in a corner. We don't wish to humiliate
15 you. We particularly don't wish to escalate militarily anymore
16 than is absolutely essential to achieve that objective. Now
17 that's not what a blockade normally means. This wasn't called a
18 blockade, I understand that. It was called a quarantine. But you
19 said what are we doing to the average person in the Pentagon --
20 we're blockading Cuba. Well, we're not blockading Cuba in the
21 way we had run blockades in the previous 200 years. That was not
22 widely understood and we had one hell of a time during the initial
23 days in making clear that it wasn't the traditional blockade.

24 MR. JOHNSON: Blackade is normally an act of war in
25 international law. And that word quarantine was very carefully

1 chosen in order to avoid the term of blockade by our legal
2 advisers, and a very important part of the success -- or the
3 rationale for it was that we got the OAS states unanimously to
4 approve a quarantine on the grounds of self-defense, which did
5 not make it an act of war. And that's -- That's -- The word
6 was very advisedly chosen.

7 MR. BALL: It wasn't without some precedent. It
8 was a word that Roosevelt had used, you may recall.

9 MR. McNAMARA: Yes -- little precedent in terms of
10 operations.

11 MR. JOHNSON: But -- But the word was used very
12 advisedly, not just for political purposes, but to give inter-
13 national sanction to what we were doing. And we did have inter-
14 national sanction.

15 MR. NEUSTADT: -- two different issues here. One is --
16 diplomatic and the other operational.

17 MR. McNAMARA: The point is we had thousands, liter-
18 ally thousands of people involved in implementing the President's
19 decision to quarantine Cuba, and they all had to have orders. We
20 had planes flying all over the world. We had ships at sea. We
21 had officers in -- in the war rooms issuing instructions. We had
22 messages flowing back and forth. And everyone had to have -- be
23 perfectly clear in their mind there was a difference between
24 quarantine and blockade, or between, I'll say, and act of war and
25 a non-act of war, or between starting a war and not starting a

1 war, or between going beyond the President's narrow purpose and
2 not going beyond it.

3 The President was really trying to write a letter in
4 terms that Khrushchev would understand. He sent messages by cable,
5 of course. But he felt those would be possibly misunderstood and
6 he was, in a sense, writing a letter through the application of
7 a quarantine. Now that's quite different than what the Navy had
8 been doing for 200 years.

9 MR. BUNDY: And the difference, I think, can be
10 expressed in another way in terms of who really was going to
11 decide what, because the fact that the President was designing
12 a communication meant that he had to consider each evolving step
13 in that process of communication from the point of view of what
14 he was trying to do. And that's why -- We talked in Atlanta about
15 the President being a desk officer, and I remarked down there
16 that he had an assistant desk officer. And when you have a desk
17 officer and an assistant desk office, and they decide that they
18 will decide what ships will do what, it's not entirely surprising
19 if the successors of John Paul Jones are startled.

20 MR. McNAMARA: Well, you might use the word John Paul
21 Jones advisedly because this came up one night and the assistant
22 desk officer didn't leave the Pentagon, or just slept at the Pen-
23 tagon every night for ten or eleven nights, because of the neces-
24 sity of being certain that in this very peculiar situation, the
25 President's wishes, and desires and decisions were clearly

1 understood by everyone.

2 And I recall very clearly one night -- I think it was
3 the Wednesday night after the quarantine became effect. If I
4 recall correctly, the quarantine became effective at 10:00 A.M.
5 on Wednesday morning, and at that -- that night we were looking
6 ahead to the potential events of the next 24 hours and it was
7 apparent that at least one Soviet ship would approach the so-
8 called quarantine line during that period. And the question was
9 what should be done. And the answer from -- I'll call it the
10 traditionalists, or the answer according to tradition was obvious
11 -- stop it. But it wasn't as obvious that stopping it was the
12 action that would be most consistent with the President's deci-
13 sion, and it wasn't at all clear exactly how it would be stopped,
14 or what would happen if it were stopped.

15 As it turned out, it was a tanker. And when one
16 explored the ways in which one could stop a tanker, one could--
17 one could think about talking to it, or radioing to it, or send-
18 ing up signal flags and stopping it that way, but then if it
19 didn't stop, what does one do. And you can fire across its bow
20 and if it still doesn't stop, you think about what to do, and
21 the next level of pressure is to actually fire into the rudder
22 or other parts of the tanker, and the damn thing might well of
23 exploded. And you get quite a different level of pressure on
24 Khrushchev than the President perhaps wished to apply at that
25 time. And the traditionalists, in effect, said, well, McNamara,

1 you don't seem to understand that for 200 years, since John Paul
2 Jones -- He must have heard of this story, because those were
3 the exact words used. You don't seem to understand that for 200
4 years, since John Paul Jones, the Navy has operated blockades
5 very successfully and we no doubt can do the same thing here.

6 But this was not a blockade to be run in the tradition
7 of the 200 years. And therefore, the actions had to be monitored
8 and were monitored very, very closely, both within the Pentagon,
9 and between the Pentagon and the National Security Council, and
10 the Office of the President. And I think, with hindsight, suc-
11 cessfully.

12 What actually happened in that case, as you know, is
13 the tanker was allowed -- allowed to proceed.

14 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, you know, there's the great story,
15 the earlier great story of -- of -- of the planes lined-up wing-
16 tip to wingtip in Florida --

17 MR. McNAMARA: No. No, if I may interrupt you. The
18 story was not quite that. The story was that we sent reconnaiss-
19 ance aircraft over Cuba and they came back and they showed pic-
20 tures of the stupid damn Soviets and Cubans lining their planes
21 up wingtip to wingtip, and we showed those to the President. The
22 President said, well, I'm glad they're stupid. He said, by the
23 way, he said, how are our planes doing. He said, send reconnaiss-
24 ance planes over Florida, and by God, they were lined-up the same
25 way.

1 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, I'm sorry I misstated it. It's
2

hard to keep standard operating procedures from operating.

3 Bob, what do you think if this kind of monitoring had
4 had to go into a third week?

5 MR. McNAMARA: I think it can continue indefinitely.

6 What you have to have in purpose, intent, understand it. And
7 that, I think, we had at the top. We had it at the Presidential
8 level. I hope we had it at my level. We had a Chairman of the
9 Joint Chiefs that was absolutely superb, the highest possible
10 sense of integrity -- I'm speaking of Max Taylor. And when you
11 have those three layers determined to monitor, I don't think that
12 an extention of time need weaken the monitoring. You just -- You
13 know, you replace one person with a deputy, or whatever, and you
14 -- And also, over time, you begin to clarify, the common law
15 begins to develop precedence and understanding.

16 MR. NEUSTADT: That's as long as you're running a
17 quarantine.

18 MR. McNAMARA: Well, under whatever situation. What
19 I'm really suggesting is I think that if it's very clear that
20 the President is in control, is making decisions, and that was
21 clear in this situation, and if it's very clear that the Secre-
22 tary is acting for him and with his full authority, and if you
23 have a Chairman of the Joint Chiefs who is strong, experienced,
24 and absolutely determined to carry out the decisions, and the
25 desires, and the thoughts of the President and the Secretary,

1 then I think this kind of monitoring can go on indefinitely, and
2 you just get organized to ensure that it does.

3 MR. BUNDY: But let me -- Let me ask a question that
4 may -- may sharpen your question, because I think it's certainly
5 true about the quarantine, which is after all the use of naval
6 power in a situation where we had commanding superiority, that
7 once you find that your object is to stop those ships or signal
8 those ships that the President wishes stopped or signaled, and
9 you have clearcut chain, everything follows as Bob has just
10 expressed it.

11 One of the reasons precisely for choosing the blockade
12 was that it was even in anticipation something that you could
13 manage, and calling it a quarantine, you could manage it the
14 better and explain it the better. And one of the reasons for
15 rejecting the air strike, especially the closer you looked at it,
16 was that you did have this very important assertion of opera-
17 tional requirements. I'm not saying the President couldn't have
18 ordered a single airplane to strike if he wanted to, but the
19 problem would have been very different, because it would have
20 been against possible opposition. And running that kind of engage-
21 ment, while you can do it in terms of the loyalty of your coman-
22 ders, is very much harder in terms of the predictability of res-
23 ponse or the character of the engagement that may pull you onward
24 in the second, third and fourth stages.

25 MR. BALL: If you'd lost 10 planes out of your 50

1 sorties, it would have been --

41
380

2 MR. McNAMARA: But I want to go back though and stress
3 what I said, because -- And this is not wishful thinking and
4 you'll think my thought was father of the wish. That is not the
5 case. But I want to say that we are living in a world in which
6 when there is conflict between the Soviet Union and the United
7 States, or between the Warsaw Pact and NATO, I believe it must
8 be monitored this way, and I mean literally this way, 24 hours
9 a day, by the President and the Secretary and the Chairman.

10 And the reason I say that is, is that they're 6000
11 nuclear warheads on the soil of Western Europe and about 3000
12 of those are within almost an artillery shot of the border, and
13 those things can be overrun and overrun very quickly.

14 MR. JOHNSON: Bob, I'll add to that --

15 MR. McNAMARA: And therefore -- Just one further word,
16 Alex, if I may finish. And therefore, it is absolutely essential
17 that in the future, when these two great powers, the Warsaw Pact
18 and NATO, come in military confrontation that every single action
19 be monitored as closely as they were during this situation.

20 MR. BUNDY: And with this much -- Excuse me, because
21 I think I'm defending my position in the face of an oblique
22 attack by my learned friend.

23 MR. McNAMARA: No, no, no --

24 MR. BUNDY: But I think you're right, but doesn't it
25 follow that the level of direct military conflict that we can

1 tolerate between the United States and the Soviet Union without
2 the gravest risk that this kind of control becomes unmanageable
3 is really quite low compared to what we have understood in the
4 past.

5 MR. McNAMARA: Yes. Yes, but maybe we can't avoid --

6 MR. BUNDY: Some.

7 MR. McNAMARA: -- some and we -- we blunder into it. I
8 don't believe that -- I know we don't want a conflict with the
9 Soviet Union. I don't really believe the Soviet Union wants one
10 with us, but we can certainly blunder into it. And as a matter
11 of fact, I would guess that within the next ten, fifteen years
12 we will blunder into it, hopefully low level. And what I'm sug-
13 gesting is that one of the lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis
14 is in this nuclear age the President, and the Secretary and the
15 Chairman must personally monitor every single action 24 hours
16 a day. Now it gets much more difficult when you have troops
17 engaged in a broader front -- No, I understand. But it's got to
18 be done that way.

19 MR. JOHNSON: I add to that that I most thoroughly
20 agree and in my lectures to war colleges and chiefs and so on,
21 I always phrase it in terms that the President in this day in
22 age, the nuclear age, is going to require and demand absolute
23 control whenever -- and our communications, our command arrange-
24 ments, not only in Defense, but also in State as well, our
25 ambassadors, have to be such that they are immediately responsive

1 to the President's -- the President's wishes. And there's no --

2 MR. BUNDY: Well, far be it from a White House-type to
3 say that that's a bad idea.

4 MR. JOHNSON: No. I think it's -- You've raised a
5 valid point. At what point does it become -- a scale that doesn't
6 become impossible. But, I think it's a very, very important point
7 to be made and I don't think it's fully accepted yet.

8 MR. McNAMARA: No. I don't think it's accepted.

9 MR. BUNDY: No. Tradition runs the other way, unfor-
10 tunately. The ambassador is tired of getting instructions from
11 the Department, let alone instructions from the White House.

12 MR. JOHNSON: I know, but we're accustomed to respond-
13 ing to a President a little bit.

14 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, it certainly runs the other way
15 in the American military tradition. The commander in the field
16 is --

17 MR. JOHNSON: You assign the mission and he's given
18 the responsibility for carrying it out. And I'll always say that
19 those days are over. Those days are over.

20 MR. NEUSTADT: I'd love to know -- Well, never mind.

21 You -- You -- Another aspect --

22 MR. McNAMARA: Let me interrupt your thought. I'd love
23 to know whether the Soviets have the same view and are prepared
24 and capable of doing it. And if they aren't, we ought to be
25 talking to them about it, because it takes two to hold down this

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1 level of risk in a nuclear age. I'm sorry I interrupted you, 383
2 Dick, but I -- We ought to be discussing these kind of subjects
3 with them. This -- This is another lesson from this conflict.
4

5 Some people have said, well, nuclear weapons really
6 didn't play a part in the Cuban Missile Crisis in the sense of
7 we never intended to use them. That's certainly the case. But
8 it's not true that they weren't on our minds. And those of us
who -- who -- who --

9 MAN'S VOICE: That's an important distinction.

10 MR. McNAMARA: Well, it is an important distinction
11 and it relates to today because -- to the point we were talking
12 about. Because those of us who are concerned about Soviet reac-
13 tion to air strikes or invasion didn't believe that the Soviet
14 political leaders, even in the face of a massive air strike or
15 an invasion, would authorize -- or thought it unlikely, I should
16 say -- that the Soviet political leaders would authorize the
17 launch of a nuclear weapon from the island of Cuba against the
18 U.S. But we didn't know that they had the power to prevent it.
19 And in the face of a military strike by the U.S. against a
20 missile site or an invasion, we couldn't be sure that the second
21 lieutenant in command wouldn't, perhaps quite properly in his
22 mind, feel that it was his responsibility to launch the nuclear
23 weapon before it was destroyed.

24 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, they must have some -- some com-
25 parable worries.

1 MR. BALL: Well, this explains why we all got two
2 -- ten years older in two weeks.

3 MR. McNAMARA: But what it also emphasizes, I think,
4 is that we ought to have more certainty about what their --
5 their controls are and they ought to have more certainty about
6 what ours are. And we both ought to think more about how to
7 minimize the risk of these weapons. The weapons aren't going to
8 be destroyed so quickly that we won't have opportunity to use
9 them if we wish to. God forbid we would ever wish to.

10 But what we must try to do is avoid using them before
11 we wish to or being pressured into using them when we would find
12 it to our disadvantage to use them if we'd had more time or more
13 certainty they could be protected.

14 MR. JOHNSON: I'm intrigued by the thought -- following
15 up your thought, intrigued by the thought of having -- having
16 the Soviets and Americans without operational responsibilities.
17 Not to negotiate with each other, but having continuity within
18 their governments and continuity within their departments, sit
19 down and discuss these matters such as this, including where are
20 we going on this -- on this nuclear escalation, in an abstract a
21 manner as you can get, but to exchange thoughts on it and get a
22 dialogue going on it that's not dependent upon changes in our
23 government, not dependent on changes in the Soviet government,
24 but to get some -- some dialogue going and try to develop some
25 common -- common doctrines and channels that could be used and

1 applied in cases of -- of emergency. I realize the difficulties
2 on it, but I think that the stakes are so high --

3 MR. McNAMARA: Realize the danger in not doing it.

4 MR. JOHNSON: That's it. Yes, that's right. That we've
5 got to find someway of doing it.

6 MR. BUNDY: You need to underline, too, I think the
7 point that practice in communication really does enter in. That
8 is to say, if you have this kind of thing going and you use it,
9 even for quite different things -- And the President uses it,
10 and the Chairman uses it and they get some sense of the way each
11 other are as communicating persons, then if you have this kind
12 of danger, I don't say that it makes it easy, but it -- it
13 increases the chance that you will avoid some catastrophic mis-
14 understanding.

15 MR. JOHNSON: I -- I most thoroughly agree.

16 MR. BALL: Well, of course, it was the exchange of
17 personal letters in this case that made --

18 MR. JOHNSON: Yes, but that was between the two -- two
19 presidents and --

20 MR. BUNDY: And didn't have the wider context we're
21 talking about.

22 MR. NEUSTADT: Alex, you wanted -- You had wanted to
23 bring up a question -- I think we ought to insert right here for
24 a minute, and then -- then go to a negotiations that took place,
25 semi-negotiations took place later in the second week of this

1 crisis. It's another example of very good management. The effort
2 made in the State Department to get simultaneous notification
3 and diplomatic initiative started with all the OAS governments
4 and with all our European allies all at once. I don't know whe-
5 there State has ever managed anything on that scale before, or
6 since, for that matter, but it was very effectively done.

7 MR. JOHNSON: No, I don't think that we have. And I
8 think that that was the time that we had to do that. We were
9 given 24 hours from Saturday -- from Saturday at Midnight until
10 Sunday Midnight, before the President's speech, to send out
11 personal messages from the President to some 15-16 chiefs of
12 state, to brief our ambassadors --

13 MR. BUNDY: To put them in position, you mean, because
14 they weren't delivered until the Monday, I think.

15 MR. JOHNSON: Oh, no, they were not. This is preposi-
16 tion -- getting all these things prepositioned. We sent out some
17 450 messages in those -- in those 24 hours, containing presiden-
18 tial messages, containing the text of the President's speech,
19 containing the resolution for the Security Council, instructions
20 to our ambassadors, getting all our ambassadors in Latin America
21 back to their posts, and having them poised to -- to see each
22 chief of state there as quickly as they could after the speech,
23 to get their agree to the OAS resolution, so that -- And all the
24 things that we also did in NATO. Dispatching Dean Acheson to
25 see DeGualle. All these things took a lot of time even under the

1 best of circumstances. And I feel that a part of the success of
2 the Cuban operation from our standpoint was the fact that when
3 we -- when this got surfaced, we had a solid phalanx in Latin
4 America for the first time, we had a solid phalanx. We had
5 every chief of every government, non-communist government in the
6 world, that had been briefed on this. And Khrushchev found him-
7 self faced with a solid wall of -- of -- you know, support --
8 support for the United States, in general, in this. And I think
9 it had a great effect upon his -- his decision to see or to throw
10 in the towel and see that he had to respond to this. They had not
11 done anything comparable at all. They had done no contingency
12 planning. They had not lined up any support. And it became very,
13 very evident --

14 MR. BUNDY: They didn't even have a line for several
15 cases.

16 MR. JOHNSON: They didn't have a line for several
17 cases. And what I'm saying is I think that this was a big factor
18 in the success of the operation. I always point to it, of course,
19 as being, to my mind, a model of the use of military power and
20 diplomacy together to accomplish a major national objective with-
21 out ever being required to fire a shot.

22 MR. BALL: Well, let me say it was an extraordinary
23 technical performance on the part of the Career Service. I never
24 was more pleased in my life with the State Department --

25 MR. McNAMARA: Led by Alex.

1 MR. BALL: Led by Alex. Led by Alex. 388

2 MR. JOHNSON: Well, I wasn't asking for that, but --

3 MR. BALL: No, no.

4 (Several speaking at once briefly here.)

5 MR. NEUSTADT: That's one of those things. There are
6 very few times in the world where you hear just those words said.

7 MR. McNAMARA: Well, one other comment on the Career
8 Service. The unsung heros of this whole operation were the
9 ^{Bob}~~Bo~~^{lens} ^{Chris}~~lens~~, and the ^{John}~~Polands~~, and the Kennans. Now it's true that
10 George Kennan wasn't in the country at the time and ^{John}~~Bo~~^{lens} left
11 for Paris in the middle of it, but Tommy was here the whole time,
12 and all three of them had built-up an understanding through a
13 lifetime of study of the Soviet Union and their behavior that
14 was the foundation of advice to those of us who were not as
15 experienced as they, and I think was the foundation of the
16 President's confidence in the advice he received, and substan-
17 tially shaped the President's approach to the question. There's
18 absolutely no question in my mind about that.

19 MR. BALL: Llewellyn Thompson was absolutely fantastic
20 because everything he predicted worked out exactly as he said it
21 would.

22 MR. BUNDY: Let me give you a very specific example,
23 because it relates to the original problem of -- Just one -- and
24 I'll be out of your way. It relates to the initial choice and
25 takes us back to that. One of the worries that bothered some of

1 us who were doubtful about the blockade-quarantine in the early
2 stages was that it looked to us as if it might easily lead to
3 a response against Berlin, and there was a certain surface plaus-
4 ibility to that. That was the first British Foreign Office reac-
5 tion the following week --

6 MR. BALL: And we'd been having Berlin troubles.

7 MR. BUNDY: And we'd been having Berlin troubles.

8 Tommy thought about that, and I remember very well his saying in
9 George's conference room, I just don't think they think that way.
10 They will not think that a reply to a naval action in the Carib-
11 bean should be a major assault on Western European and on all
12 the other countries that that would involve. And he was surely
13 right.

14 MR. BALL: One other thing that he said at that time,
15 which impressed me very much, because it was rather a novel idea
16 to me. When we were talking about the question of getting the
17 OAS approval and the U.N. and so. He said this is terribly impor-
18 tant because the Soviets are very legalistic.

19 MR. McNAMARA: I recall that as well, George, exactly.

20 MR. NEUSTADT: Bourgeois.

21 MR. JOHNSON: Well, all I was going to say, I entirely
22 -- obviously entirely agree with, you know, Tommy. Chip was only
23 there for the first couple of days, but Tommy contributed so,
24 so much to it.

25 But what I was going to say was, you know, Tommy just

1 didn't grow on a tree during the course of that crisis. He had
2 been -- gone into the Foreign Service years and years before,
3 and he'd been nurtured and trained, and he had the experience --

4 MR. BUNDY: We understand that he was in FSO eight,
5 seven, six --

6 MR. JOHNSON: That's right. Well, I just like to say
7 a word for the importance -- important, I think, of -- of what
8 our professional service can do and the service that it can be
9 in these times. And it requires -- It requires though that it be
10 nurtured and continued.

11 MR. BUNDY: And requires something that I'm not that
12 sure that we do as well now as we did with that generation,
13 namely to give the professional time to master in depth what is
14 not the whole world, but is a major fraction.

15 MR. JOHNSON: No, we don't. We don't.

16 MR. NEUSTADT: We don't have anything like those two
17 services now.

18 MR. JOHNSON: No, no. We don't even have it in the
19 Japan and the China service.

20 MR. McNAMARA: I was just going to say. One of the
21 reasons I raised it, because by contrast, during the -- so much
22 of the Vietnam period we were left with a vacuum that had been
23 created by the McCarthy days in the mid-50s, and today, it's my
24 impression, just looking at it from the outside, that the service
25 is not permitted to specialize, as Mac said, to provide

1 professionals with the time to pick-up the languages, to pick-up
2 the culture, to study the history, to become lifetime experts in
3 a particular area of the world.

4 MR. JOHNSON: Well, you know, that's music to my ears
5 and I could go on in that, but --

6 MR. BUNDY: I think -- We're not -- It's actually not
7 your ears we're shooting at.

8 MR. McNAMARA: No, and it's one of the lessons I think
9 we need to draw from this, and this is why I want to express my
10 thought. Because as an outsider, who could hardly spell...?

11 (End of Side 1, Audiotape No. 2)

12 MR. McNAMARA (Continuing on Side 2): ... working
13 without a solid foundation of knowledge. And I think so many of
14 our -- of our civilian appointees in the upper ranks of the
15 government are in that position. And it's the -- It's the founda-
16 tion of expertise that is built-up in particular parts of the
17 government, in the military or the CIA, or particularly in the
18 State Department, that is absolutely essential. And I do not
19 believe today our society puts the premium on it that it should.

20 MR. JOHNSON: Well, we can go on with this, but of
21 course we've -- But the Administration now changing every four
22 years, as it has ever since Eisenhower, and each new Administra-
23 tion coming into office on the -- on the policy or the platform
24 of throwing the rascals out, you know, our service is being very,
25 very badly --

1 MR. McNAMARA: Or denigrating. Denigrating the senior

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2 people in the --

3 MR. BUNDY: Because they're contaminated.

4 MR. JOHNSON: They're contaminated with the previous
5 Administration, yes.

6 MR. NEUSTADT: Then you see -- Then you link that, Bob,
7 to your command and control, it's depressing. If I were the
8 Soviets, I'd have no confidence in this control you talk about.
9 Why should they, over on our side? I mean how, you know --

10 Anyway, I wanted to ask you gentlemen about one final
11 aspect of this business. The second Saturday. First there was
12 the trollop ploy. I've got a minor question. I've never under-
13 stood why that was such an all-fired genius of an idea. It seems
14 to me more or less standard. Am I wrong? Correct me.

15 MR. JOHNSON: No, no. I wouldn't say it was standard
16 at all. It seemed quite obvious. But that second message we got
17 we had to assume had been sent after the first message and we had
18 to assume that it probably, something had happened to change his
19 mind in the interim.

20 MR. BALL: Well, moreover, it was perfectly clear that
21 that second message was written by a committee. It was not dis-
22 patched --

23 MR. McNAMARA: It was dispatched -- That was the view
24 of the Soviet government. That was clear.

25 (Several speaking at once briefly here.)

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1. MR. NEUSTADT: Right. Right. Okay. -- more understand-

2. able.

3. MR. JOHNSON: And -- But -- But -- You can say now
4. that it looks kind of obvious that you should do the trollop
5. ploy and pick-up the first one, but -- And thank goodness we did
6. it. It was the thing to do and it worked. But I don't know why --
7. It wasn't obvious at the time, I might say --

8. MR. NEUSTADT: That's what I wanted to get.

9. MR. BUNDY: I think the shock of the second message
10. is understandable, because we had, after a period of very severe
11. tension, thought we saw in the Friday message the beginnings of
12. -- the beginnings of a resolution and now we're confronted with
13. all the stuffed -- bureaucratic prose on a very different line,
14. and that's a shock. I agree with you, if the point of your ques-
15. tion is that it would have been stupid if we hadn't worked our
16. way to some -- something like the trollop ploy, some way of
17. re-proposing the parts that we agreed with and not -- not wasting
18. too much time on frantic argument over the things we didn't agree
19. with. That was good sense. But it was good sense produced ini-
20. tially by Bob Kennedy at a moment of great tension, and that's a
21. major contribution.

22. MR. McNAMARA: Absolutely. And I can recall leaving the
23. White House after it had been decided which message to reply to
24. and after the reply had been drafted and approved by the Presi-
25. dent, and it was being sent out. It was a Saturday evening. I can

1 remember the sunset. We left about the time the sun was setting,
2 in October, and I, at least, was so uncertain as to whether the
3 Soviets would accept replying to the first instead of the second,
4 or accept -- in a sense, our acceptance of the formula of the
5 first, that I wondered if I'd ever see another Saturday sunset
6 like that. 394

7 MR. JOHNSON: I think --

8 MR. McNAMARA: *(That may sound over-dramatic, but that*
9 *was the way I was feeling at the time. It was that serious a*
10 *problem. That was Saturday night.*

11 MR. JOHNSON: That's right. No, no. I think many of us
12 felt that.

13 MR. NEUSTADT: And that's because you were looking
14 *(the umbrella)*
15 ahead to Tuesday, or whatever day it was --was to have been, or
Wednesday.

16 MR. McNAMARA: Exactly. Exactly.

17 MR. NEUSTADT: And then Wednesday. Escalation after
18 the --

19 MR. McNAMARA: That is right, and the possible -- And
20 there was a very tiny possibility, I understand, Dick, but the
21 possible) effect on our country of even one of those warheads,
22 nuclear warheads being launched against us.

23 MR. BALL: Bob, you and I were walking through the Rose
24 Garden the following morning and the weather was the most beauti-
25 ful weather I could ever recall. And I said, walking through the

1 Rose Garden, this reminds me of a Georgia O'Keefe painting of
2 an -- of a rose coming up through an ^{ox skull} -- And that was exactly
3 the kind of --

4 MR. McNAMARA: Yes. We hadn't had the reply yet.

5 MR. BALL: That's right. No.

6 MR. NEUSTADT: Tell me one other thing. Paul Nitze was
7 represented to me by a couple of his assistants on that night, at
8 that time, who received him when he got back to his office. He
9 was your Assistant Secretary, who had a rather different view
10 of a lot of these matters, as terribly depressed about the day,
11 but for a quite different set of reasons. He worried about the --
12 about Robert Kennedy's mission to Dobrynin and he was appalled
13 at the notion of, as it had been told to me, of defusing the
14 missiles in Turkey.

15 MR. McNAMARA: Dick, I don't have that recollection
16 and let me give you one reason why I think it's unlikely. I
17 don't have the recollection at all and I think it's unlikely
18 because, frankly, I don't believe Paul knew of the decision
19 which had been taken by that time of removing the missiles from
20 Turkey. Because I didn't tell anybody and there were only a
21 handful of people, five or six --

22 MR. BALL: Let's make sure we're talking about the
23 same thing. There was a defusing of missiles in Turkey, that is
24 to say, rendering them incapable of firing without an authority,
25 which occurred during that week. I think Paul did react to that.

1 MR. McNAMARA: But it wasn't that Saturday that they
2 were defused.

3 MR. BUNDY: It might have happened earlier.

4 (Several again speaking at the same time briefly.)

5 MR. BALL: It happened late in the day.

6 MR. McNAMARA: No, but what -- But what happened on
7 the Saturday --

8 MAN'S VOICE: I can tell you what happened.

9 MR. McNAMARA: -- was quite a different action. And I
10 don't think Paul knew of it. In any event, I don't myself recall
11 the incident you're speaking of.

12 MR. JOHNSON: Dick, on this --

13 MR. BUNDY: I'm quite sure Paul did not know about
14 the quite separate question of readiness to remove the missiles.

15 MR. NEUSTADT: Yes. That's what I meant by the -- by
16 the trip to Dobrynin.

17 MAN'S VOICE: That's what you meant by that.

18 MR. NEUSTADT: Yes.

19 MAN'S VOICE: He didn't know about that.

20 MR. McNAMARA: I don't think so either, Dick.

21 MR. JOHNSON: In regard to the course of action, I know
22 it's been said that Paul -- this quarantine, that Paul was not --
23 not in support of this. All I can say is that Paul and I --

24 MR. BALL: It was Saturday morning that he ordered the
25 missiles defused. Saturday morning.

1 MR. JOHNSON: Paul and I drafted the scenario that --
2 that set forth the program that was eventually followed. We
3 worked -- We worked very, very hard at this, I on the diplomatic
4 side and he on the military side.

5 MR. McNAMARA: I think by the time of the decision --

6 MR. JOHNSON: And he worked -- He worked most intim-
7 ately on this and most full of support insofar as my association
8 with him was concerned.

9 MR. McNAMARA: I think that by the time the decision
10 was made to -- to move the blockade and certainly after it was
11 made --

12 MR. JOHNSON: Quarantine.

13 MR. McNAMARA: I mean the quarantine. Certainly after
14 it was made, which would include that Saturday, Paul was not
15 present for that --

16 MR. BUNDY: We can't hurt you now, Alex.

17 MR. NEUSTADT: Well, I only raise it because for 20
18 years people have gone around talking about Paul's views, and I
19 thought since he -- We haven't been able to lure him into this
20 for natural, understandable reasons, given his assignment.

21 MR. JOHNSON: I normally sat next to him in the ExComs
22 on this and we had a very close relationship, and I never felt
23 that he was objecting when the decision was finally made. I think
24 we all -- We all were on both sides of the question throughout
25 that week and we all gradually came --

MR. BUNDY: I think one should make an underline to

2 this point, that whatever the differences of opinion and argu-
3 ments and preferences had been in the period leading up to the
4 decision, I don't think there was any question -- There wasn't
5 a single member of ExCom who didn't track with each decision as
6 the President made it all the way along, which isn't to say
7 that a particular officer may not have been discouraged by the
8 tenor of discussion on a particular day. That's quite possible.

9 But I think we ought to come back, if you agree, Dick,
10 to the -- the messages Bob actually carried, Bob Kennedy, on the
11 Saturday, because those certainly were important and we haven't
12 talked about them at this session.

22 MR. McNAMARA: Well, that's my understanding of what
23 the President decided. That's my understanding of what he author-
24 ized Bobby to say, and as far as I know, he said it exactly like
that. And I must -- Oh, one further point. He was instructed to

1 make clear that if the Soviets ever discussed this, we would
2 deny it. And the point I was going to make was that we did remove
3 the missiles. I think this was a very important point from
4 Khrushchev's personal point of view within the Soviet govern-
5 ment. He undoubtedly had to tell other people that this had been
6 told to him by President Kennedy. There wasn't, to the best of
7 my knowledge, one single leak by either government. It was a
8 remarkable action.

9 And we did remove the missiles.

10 MAN'S VOICE: How much trouble did you have with that?
11 There was another case where we had the right man as assistant
12 desk officer.

13 MR. McNAMARA: Well, I went back -- After the Presi-
14 dent had authorized this, I told him I would personally handle
15 it. I went back and I called John McNaughton, who was a marvelous
16 man all of you knew, and who you know was killed in an accident
17 shortly after. And I said John, I'm going to tell you something.
18 I don't want you to ask any questions about it. I don't want you
19 to say to anybody else why it's being done, 'cause I'm not going
20 to tell you, I just want you to do it, and I want every single
21 missile removed out of Turkey. I want them taken to Italy. I want
22 them cut up. I want photographs of them and I want it done by X
23 date, and I want the photographs in my hand, now do it. Don't ask
24 questions, just do it. And he did it.

25 MR. NEUSTADT: I understand he had a considerable

1 problem though with your department.

2 MR. JOHNSON: Yes. There was some -- playing its usual
3 role. No, I don't recall that there was -- People -- People --
4 Nobody that I can recall in our department --

5 MR. McNAMARA: A lot of people must have wondered why
6 it was being done and had it been properly prepared for, which
7 it hadn't been.

8 MR. JOHNSON: Well, no. The concern in my department
9 was had the Italian and the Turkish governments been prepared
10 for it.

11 MR. McNAMARA: Which they hadn't been.

12 MR. JOHNSON: Which they hadn't been.

13 MR. BALL: Well, we had been talking to them for a
14 long time. They got most of the blame in the books for it.

15 (Several talking simultaneously throughout this
16 section.)

17 MR. JOHNSON: But the important point here, Dick, is
18 the President made the decision to have them removed long before
19 the Missile Crisis in Cuba. That's a very, very important --

20 MR. BALL: With -- With the Turkish government, pri-
21 marily with the Turkish government, and they were not -- Theore-
22 tically, say, they were committed to NATO. They were something
23 where NATO was involved. I mean it wasn't a purely unilateral
24 decision.

25 MR. JOHNSON: That's right.

1 MR. BALL: -- that the United States could make.

2 MR. JOHNSON: And that's what --

3 MR. BALL: Of course, by that time, we were hoping that
4 there would be -- the Polarises would be sufficiently present
5 so that this wouldn't be needed anyway, and because they prob-
6 ably didn't work.

7 MR. BUNDY: Years later, in fact just this last year,
8 I found myself reading memorandum of a meeting in the Oval Office
9 and the next preceding Administration, in which a message is
10 delivered to President Eisenhower to the effect that senior
11 commanders are beginning to question the usefulness of the
12 short range missiles in Turkey, to which his reply is, but I
13 always told them they shouldn't do that.

14 MR. McNAMARA: Now this is a very interesting point.
15 Here again, we're talking about military realities on the one
16 hand and perceptions on the other, which were misperceptions,
17 but had become reality in place of the underlying reality. The
18 missiles were worthless in the Eisenhower Administration. They
19 sure as hell were worthless and known to be worthless in the
20 Kennedy Administration. And yet, because the Soviets during the
21 Cuban Missile Crisis said, in effect, they said we won't remove
22 our missiles from Cuba unless you remove yours from Turkey, there
23 was almost a requirement that we go to war with the Soviets to
24 preserve missiles in Turkey that were worthless. And there was a
25 real danger at one point that that --

1 MR. BUNDY: State of mind would take over.

2 MR. McNAMARA: Exactly. Exactly. And one of our great
3 achievements, it seems to me, is we avoided that.

4 MR. NEUSTADT: That is what was bugging the President
5 at the end.

6 MR. McNAMARA: He -- I recall him saying very well, I
7 am not going to go to war over worthless missiles in Turkey. I
8 don't want to go to war anyhow, but I am certainly not going to
9 go to war over worthless missiles in Turkey. Now I don't know how
10 to get out of this. We eventually figured how to get out of it.

11 But I mention this because there is so -- There are so
12 many misperceptions existant in the world today that are driving
13 us --

14 MR. BALL: Very much so.

15 MR. BUNDY: -- military that aren't important are
16 stated to be vital.

17 MR. McNAMARA: Which become major issues between --
18 between states and between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and could
19 lead to war.

20 MR. NEUSTADT: Pershings.

21 MR. McNAMARA: Pershings a good illustration. Well,
22 let's cut that out of this tape. We don't want to lose credibility.

23 (Laughter.)

24 MR. NEUSTADT: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Have we ever -- Have
25 we ever put on record the genesis of that -- that -- that mission

1 of RFK's to Dobrynin?

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2 MR. BUNDY: Well, let me describe it as I remember it,
3 and then George and Bob were both there, and correct and amend.

4 We had the meeting in the Oval Office. We'd reached
5 the conclusion that we would make the soft answer, accepting the
6 Friday terms, no invasion of Cuba, you take your missiles out,
7 essentially. Then we get into the Oval Office and I don't want
8 to be held at the exact persons present, but as I recall it, the
9 President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense,
10 Deputy Secretary of State, or Under-Secretary were you then?

11 MR. BALL: Under, yes. I never was anything else.

12 MR. JOHNSON: So it was enough for you, George. With
13 you it was the same -- That was all there was to be, George.

14 MR. BUNDY: And then there was Gilpatrick, the Number
15 Two men in the Pentagon, and Ted Sorenson, and me. And I think
16 that's who was there. And the question was exactly how would --
17 And, of course, the Attorney General, who was to be the emissary.
18 How would he convey the message? And we went up and down,
19 sorted out how to convey the general agreement with the first
20 letter. And then, as I recall it, the Secretary of State said,
21 Dean Rusk said, "Can't we say to him that we can get those mis-
22 siles out of Turkey"?

23 MAN'S VOICE: I think it was the President who said
24 that.

25 MR. BUNDY: I know the President picked it up instantly.

1 He's been saying it all day long.

2 MR. McNAMARA: That's right, he had.

3 MR. BUNDY: He had been saying it all day long and
4 the record shows him saying it at various earlier times and
5 saying the kind of thing you describe. And what I think happened
6 was that the Secretary pushed on a point that he knew the Presi-
7 dent cared about.

8 We then hammered back and forth on it and reached the
9 conclusion that we could say it -- and I don't recall the inputs
10 at all as to the particular formulations -- reached the formula-
11 tion that we have described, that we could say what had been our
12 intention for a long time, what was our clear purpose. Soon
13 after the crisis, as long as it were not connected to the crisis,
14 as long as nobody represented it as a quid pro quo, which it was
15 not. It was a settled intent. And as long as nobody tried to
16 make an open affair of it. About the way you described it a
17 minute ago.

18 And that was not a long meeting. That might have been
19 a 20-minute meeting.

20 MR. NEUSTADT: And I think it's important for one or
21 another, whoever wants to pick-up this theme, to distinguish that
22 private, qualified assurance from shenanigans, which, again, 20
23 years later, lots of people find a hard distinction to make, of
24 -- I don't have any trouble with it, but lots of people do, so I
25 want to give you your chance to make the distinction. The -- There

1 was what was the reason why this could not be publicly acknowledged?
2

3 MR. BUNDY: None of us was able to figure out a way
4 of explaining it publicly that didn't look as if it wouldn't
5 be taken by many people as a sellout of our allies.

6 MR. BALL: And furthermore, you have to -- You have to
7 recall that this was in the context of a column that Walter
8 Lippman had had, in which Lippman had proposed that the solution
9 of this problem be through a trade. You have to remember that
10 this was a position that Adlai Stevenson had tried -- tried to
11 sell the -- the ExCom and the President when he came down from
12 New York, that it should be a bargain.

13 MR. McNAMARA: And you have to recall also that the
14 Lippman column had led to intense outcries of -- of opposition
15 from --

16 MR. BALL: From the Turks.

17 MR. McNAMARA: From the Turks and other members of
18 NATO.

19 MAN'S VOICE: And from London.

20 MR. McNAMARA: Yes, exactly, other members of NATO and
21 from the Turks.

22 MR. JOHNSON: So, the ground had not been prepared
23 at that point. If we'd -- If the missile -- We couldn't do it
24 properly.

25 MR. BUDNY: It wouldn't have worked. It would have been

1 gravely against our interest, the interest of the Alliance. It
2 would have given Khrushchev, in political terms, a victory
3 rather than --

4 MR. BALL: Yes. He would have said I got something out
5 of this and therefore it was a good thing to do.

6 MR. BUNDY: Then one step further and then I know what
7 Bob says is going to be the -- you know, the punchline. But just
8 one further small point, namely that the President had the auth-
9 ority to say what he said. He wasn't saying I'll go to the
10 Congress. He wasn't saying, as another President said in another
11 context, I'll support you if they violate the truce. He was say-
12 ing I, as President, assure you that these missiles will be gone.
13 He was talking about something he had the authority to do and
14 could execute.

15 MR. McNAMARA: I was simply going to add that it was
16 important to frame it exactly as it was framed, because don't
17 forget we were dealing not with a military problem, but with a
18 political problem. And if we had not framed the withdrawal of
19 the missiles from Turkey as we did, we would have created
20 another political problem. We would have divided the Alliance.
21 We would have weakened it and the Soviets would have faced a
22 weakened Alliance, and this would have been a danger to the
23 Alliance.

24 MR. BALL: The propaganda value against this in Europe
25 would have been here is the United States, selling -- because once

1 they're faced with some missiles themselves in Cuba, they're pre-
2 pared to sell NATO out.

3 MR. NEUSTADT: Decoupling, as one --

4 MR. McNAMARA: And again, I think because of the advice
5 we'd had from Tommy, there was a high probability the Soviets
6 would accept the explanation that was given to them and adhere
7 to the terms. Because they -- they could have seriously weakened
8 us had they disclosed those terms.

9 MR. BUNDY: And it occurs to me, as I listen to Bob,
10 that very probably Tommy Thompson was in that room. It's very
11 unlikely that the President would have worked out final instruc-
12 tions for a communication to the Soviet government at that stage
13 of the crisis without Thompson.

14 MR. JOHNSON: I don't know that you've covered, Dick,
15 as far as this settlement was concerned, that we not only got the
16 missiles out, but we also got out in the subsequent negotiations
17 the IL-28 bombers, 42 of them that were in there. They were of
18 great concern to us. The bombers were not a part of the -- the
19 agreement.

20 MR. BUNDY: We'd initially agreed to tolerate the
21 bombers, you recall.

22 MR. JOHNSON: To tolerate the bombers. And we got the
23 bombers out also.

24 MR. BUNDY: Also, because Thompson told the President
25 he could.

1 MR. JOHNSON: He could, yes. 69
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2 MR. McNAMARA: And once last word, to attempt to
3 re-create the environment of the time. After the missiles were
4 moved and the bombers removed and after we had reconnaissance
5 aircraft fly 25 feet off the decks of the freighters removing
6 the missiles and the bombers, so low you could read the serial
7 numbers on the missiles, and we accounted for every missile and
8 every bomber, it was still widely believed in the country that
9 we'd been defeated, the Soviets had not taken them out. And you
10 may remember there was therefore a live television program that
11 went on for an hour-and-a-half while John Hughes, who was the
12 intelligence expert in the Defense Intelligence Agency, pre-
13 sented the pictures and presented the argument, and we then
14 answered questions from the press to try to allay the fears of
15 important parts of the U.S. public and the Congress that we'd
16 been defeat, that the Soviets had not done what they said they
17 would do.

18 I mention this to show you the environment within
19 which these decisions took place and why there was so much con-
20 troversy over what alternatives should be followed.

21 MR. BUNDY: And let me make one other point here that
22 is very important, I think, for the long run future. We haven't
23 had time to discuss it, but when you go back and look at this
24 two-week period, one of the most important events, a controlling
25 event is the President's speech to the country. You go back and

1 re-read that speech today and you'll see that to an astonishing
2 degree he laid out the reasons in the very political wide-scale
3 sense, not the missile-counting sense, made the distinction that
4 we've made in this discussion, that Bob McNamara has made parti-
5 cularly, made the case that this was something to be settled in
6 terms of the long run peace of the world. Explained what was
7 going to happen and carried the country with him, which became
8 very clear.

9 It's quite right that we had to have the right arrange-
10 ment, a quarantine. Quite right that we had to have the kind of
11 diplomatic mass action that Alex organized. But the most impor-
12 tant thing to have was the understanding and support of the
13 American people, and that was established that evening and sus-
14 tained through what was a very difficult week.

15 MR. JOHNSON: A very important point.

16 MR. NEUSTADT: Gentlemen, anything you want to add
17 before we conclude. We have about one minutes.

18 MR. McNAMARA: Thanks to you, Dick, for taking the time
19 to come down and lead us through this.

20 MR. NEUSTADT: Nobody wants the last minute. So thank
21 you very much.

22 MR. BUNDY: Let the tape run.

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